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SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/10/2019  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [RS](#) [AJ](#) [AM](#) [MARR](#)  
SUBJECT: MFA REJECTS CLAIMS OF ARMS TRANSFERS TO ARMENIA

REF: BAKU 73

Classified By: Pol M/C Alice Wells for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Russian Minsk Group co-chair Yuri Merzlyakov February 6 dismissed charges of recent Russian arms deliveries to Armenia, claiming the supporting documents were forged. Experts agree with that assessment, and join the MFA's January 21 statement that it would not be in Russia's interest to jeopardize its improving relations to Azerbaijan by an arms transfer to Armenia. One expert suggested only "radical groups" in Armenia could hope to gain from such a forgery. End Summary.

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MFA: Sales documents forged  
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12. (C) Russian Ambassador-at-large and Minsk Group co-chair Yuri Merzlyakov February 6 dismissed charges of recent Russian arms deliveries to Armenia. Claiming the supporting documents Azerbaijan had produced to underscore its accusations were forged, he noted they were so riddled with typographical errors "that no Russian general would ever have signed the forms." However, Merzlyakov declined to discuss who might have created the forgeries. Instead, he closed the discussion by referring to the January 21 MFA press release, which stated that the accusation was based on disinformation which did not contribute to the positive development of Russia-Azerbaijani relations. MFA Counselor for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict Elena Kravchenko afterward told us that she considered Azerbaijani President Aliyev a "Machiavellian" politician, willing to use any tool at his disposal in order to advance his interests. This included the threat to use force, but also the exploitation of such forged documents.

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Analysts agree  
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13. (C) Analysts agree with the MFA's verdict that the accusations are based on disinformation. Ruslan Pukhov of the Center for Strategic and Technological Analysis and editor of the independent Eksport Vooruzhennii magazine, which tracks Russian arms exports, said his organization had not been able to detect any sign of the alleged Russian arms transfer to Armenia. Claiming the USD 800 million price tag was probably "five to seven times too high" for the equipment listed, Pukhov noted that an operation of the volume alleged still would involve "dozens" of people, and stated it was hard to imagine such a transfer could be pulled off without any sort of "leakage" that his organization could have picked up.

14. (C) Asserting it was not in Russia's interest to reverse its recent rapprochement with Azerbaijan, and that such a sale would be a break in Russia's recent pattern not to transfer significant amounts of military equipment to the

region, Pukhov suggested instead that the issue was an Azerbaijani "provocation." Not a documents expert himself, Pukhov said the evidence proffered by Azerbaijan was considered a forgery by experts knowledgeable about the "work style of the Russian bureaucracy."

15. (C) Vadim Mukhanov from the MGIMO South Caucasus Center similarly argued that the alleged arms transfer could not be authentic, as Russia was currently pursuing closer relations with Azerbaijan, and would hardly jeopardize that progress by such a transfer. Agreeing with this logic, Alexei Vlasov from Moscow State University (MGU) accepted the MFA's assertions that the documents were forged, and posited that the only player who could have an interest in circulating forged documents would be "radical groups" in Armenia who hoped to disrupt the Russian-Azerbaijani rapprochement.

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Comment  
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16. (C) At a time when Russian President Medvedev has attempted to stake out a higher profile in shepherding a negotiated solution to Nagorno-Karabakh, it is difficult to imagine Russia's motivations in proceeding with a military transfer of this scale and nature, and Russian FM Lavrov was quick to publicly repudiate the allegations. To the extent that suspicion has flared yet again between Armenia and Azerbaijan and with the Kremlin, opponents to a settlement appear to be the beneficiaries of this incident.  
BEYRLE